DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 116 RC 023 990

AUTHOR	Powell, Gwynn M.; Bixler, Robert D. Switzer, Deborah M.; Hurtes, Karen P.
TITLE	Difficulty and Ability: Staff Member Perceptions of Seasonal Staff Training.
PUB DATE	2002-01-00
NOTE	10p.; In: Research in Outdoor Education, Volume 6. A Peer-Reviewed Publication of Scholarship First Presented at the Biennial Research Symposium of the Coalition for Education in the Outdoors (6th, Bradford Woods, IN, January 11-13, 2002); see RC 023 980.
AVAILABLE FROM	Coalition for Education in the Outdoors, SUNY at Cortland, P.O. Box 2000, Park Center, Cortland, NY 13045 ($18). Tel: 607-753-4971; e-mail: info@outdooredcoalition.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	*Ability; *Camping; *Difficulty Level; *Employee Attitudes; Job Training; Knowledge Level; Occupational Surveys; *Skill Development; *Staff Development; Staff Orientation

ABSTRACT

New and returning camp staff were surveyed about the difficulty of camp-specific skills and knowledge and their own abilities. A summer-camp training inventory of 24 camp-specific skills and knowledge statements was administered to a total of 702 new and returning staff at eight camps on the first and last day of pre-season training sessions and after 1 month on the job. Analysis of responses of 211 staff, who completed all three administrations, found that returning staff reported consistent perceptions of difficulty, while new staff reported increases over time and converged with returning staff after 1 month on the job. New staff reported an increase in perceptions of dangerous places in camp from the first to the last day of training, while returning staff reported a decrease. In dealing with homesick children, both new and returning staff reported no change in perceptions of difficulty from first to last training day, but an increase was reported after 1 month. New staff rated knowing locations of buildings to be more difficult than returning staff. For redirecting behavior, paperwork, and dealing with homesickness, new staff reported higher difficulty scores. In terms of ability, both new and returning staff reported increases throughout the summer; returning staff started with a higher self-perception of ability than new staff, but convergence occurred after 1 month. Applications to staff training are discussed. (TD)

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Difficulty and Ability: Staff Member Perceptions of Seasonal Staff Training

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Gwynn M. Powell, University of Georgia
Robert D. Bixler & Deborah M. Switzer, Clemson University
Karen P. Hurtes, University of Utah

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DIFFICULTY AND ABILITY: STAFF MEMBER PERCEPTIONS OF SEASONAL STAFF TRAINING

Gwynn M. Powell
University of Georgia

Robert D. Bixler
& Deborah M. Switzer
Clemson University

Karen P. Hurtes
University of Utah

BACKGROUND

The process that camp directors use to plan and implement their staff training and continuing education may be affected by understanding seasonal staff-member perceptions of the difficulty and ability of camp-specific skills and knowledge. The purpose of this study was to investigate staff perceptions to provide a baseline of information for practice and future research.

Camp directors spend time during the staff recruiting process informing potential staff about the rigors of the job, and at the same time balance this information by encouraging them to apply for camp positions that match their ability levels. Once the staff members arrive, a precamp orientation is provided to both increase skill and community development, and instill confidence in staff members' ability to effectively complete their job responsibilities. Staff members begin working and modify their actions based on feedback received from campers and staff throughout the employment period. Little is known about whether or not staff perceptions of the difficulty of the job or their own ability change during critical points during the summer. These perceptions may provide insight about the knowledge and skill levels of staff, and thus directly impact the experience for the campers in their care.

Motivation to learn has been studied in many contexts. Two major groups of theories specific to workplace learning are "content" and "process" (Steers, Porter, & Bigley, 1996). Content theories assume that personal factors direct individual behavior. The focus is on internal factors and how an individual prioritizes these factors. The major content theories are: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Alderfer's existence-relatedness-growth, Herzberg's motivator-hygiene, and McClelland's learned needs. Process theories focus on the psychological processes underlying how behavior is directed. The major process theories are Vroom's expectancy theory (1964) and the Porter-Lawler model (1968). The process models include some aspect of a decision-making process as part of human behavior as a component of the models.

Vroom (1964), basing his work on the theoretical frameworks of Lewin (1938) and Tolman (1959), brought together the interactive nature of characteristics of the individual and the individual's perceptions of the environment. The theory can be explained most simply by the following equation: motivation equals valance as a function of expectancy. Valence is defined by Vroom as "affective orientations toward particular outcomes. An outcome has a valence of zero when the person is indifferent to attaining or not attaining it" (1964, p.15). Expectancy is defined as "a momentary belief concerning the likelihood that a particular act will be followed by a particular outcome" (Vroom, 1964, p. 17). Due to the recognized complexity of the decision-making process, the operator between valence and expectancy was referred to as force, but was not specified as additive or multiplicative by Vroom.

Porter and Lawler (1968) contended that motivation is more complicated than Vroom outlined. They extended Vroom's model to include the individual's ability (or lack of), the perceived equity of rewards, the perception of the nature of the task, and self-ratings of performance. Both models are supported by research for

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TABLE 1
Camp-specific Skills and Knowledge that Served as the Content Items of the Questionnaire

I know how to adapt my program activity to different age groups.
I can teach my program activity in a way that accomplishes this camp's goals & philosophy
I can hold my campers' attention for the whole program activity period.
I can correct campers who are doing the program activity incorrectly in a positive way (without embarrassing them).
I can apply conflict resolution strategies to help solve problems between campers.
I can creatively occupy my group during 15-30 minute breaks in the schedule.
I can lead a group with a balance of discipline and fun.
I can get my group to places on time.
I can re-direct a situation in a positive way when something is going wrong.
I can improvise when things are not going the way I expected.
I know when I need to ask for help.
I understand the role of "being the parent" while caring for campers.
I am aware of appropriate staff behavior in order to prevent child abuse at camp.
I can help a camper overcome homesickness.
I can tell when a camper is being pushed beyond his/her limits.
I can ask open-ended questions to increase the flow of communication with campers.
I understand the "chain of command" of the camp (who is responsible for what).
I can clearly explain the details of my specific job functions at this camp.
I know how to complete the day-to-day paperwork required for my job.
I know this camp's personnel policies (do's and don'ts).
I have a complete sense of the philosophy and values of this camp.
I know where all of the camp buildings are located and could find them again.
I know all the areas that could be dangerous for campers on the camp property.
I know what to do at this camp in the event of an emergency.

Note: While these items were determined in a systematic fashion to be a specific set of camp knowledge and skills, they are not to be construed as definitive or exhaustive.

some components, but due to the complexity of the process, neither overall model has met with clear empirical support (Roberts & Glick, 1981). Both models do, however, provide a useful basis for managers to analyze and understand motivation within organizational settings. Specific to this study, these process theories were used to operationalize the measurement of perceptions regarding the learning of camp-specific job skills and knowledge.

METHOD

This article explores the univariate results of two variables (perceived difficulty and ability of camp-specific skills and knowledge) used in a broader multivariate analysis investigating informal learning and socialization among new and returning staff (Powell, 2001). As a basis for understanding the univariate results, the methods of the broader analysis will be briefly reviewed. A list of 24 camp-specific skills and knowledge statements was created based upon the triangulation of open-ended responses from a pre-study, interviews with camp directors, and review by an expert panel (see Table 1). The Summer Camp Training Inventory (SCTI) was comprised of each statement and was followed by a set of questions that were derived from the workplace organizational literature related to motivation: 1) How important is this (referring to the content item) to this camp? 2) How important is this (content item) to me? 3) How difficult do you feel this is to master? 4) How

well do you know (or can you do) this? These questions were followed by a ten-point Likert-type scale as suggested by Alwin (1992), anchored by "not at all" (0) to "extremely" (9).

Face and content validity were investigated through the review of content items by a panel, as well as through cognitive interviews (Presser and Blair, 1994) during the pre-test. Exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis results supported the constructs with all Cronbach's Alphas above .70 (Cortina, 1993; Zeller and Carmines, 1980). The ecological validity (Mook, 1983) is attributed to the fact that data were collected at the camps in the midst of summer camp season.

Parallel forms of the survey instrument were used. In order to control for framing effect and to increase cognitive availability (Clark and Schober, 1992) the conceptual categories were kept intact on both forms of the instrument. During the pre-test, non-relevant questions were used to determine whether or not staff members would admit they did not think an item was important and that they did not know how to do the item. The responses were taken at three points in time: first and last days of training and after one-month-on-the-job. Data collected at these three points were analyzed using a doubly-multivariate repeated measures MANOVA investigating time (data collection points) and status (returning versus new staff). Four composite-variables were created for each participant at each data collection point by summing the individual scores for the content items, producing overall scores for importance to camp, personal importance, difficulty, and ability. A subset of the data was used for this analysis due to the three-measure-over-time design—only those staff members (n=211) who completed the questionnaire all three times were included in this analysis. Analysis (a series of ANOVAs using demographic, camp , number of times completing the questionnaire, etc.) indicated that this sample subset was not different from the complete sample (n=702) in any apparent way. The study population consisted of staff that worked at accredited camps in the Southeastern section of the American Camping Association. The camps (8) The camps (8) were selected based on a purposeful sample to include different types of camp operations (agency, independent, co-ed, girls-only, and boys-only).

RESULTS

The four composite variables were used in an overall doubly-multivariate profile analysis, testing for differences based upon status (new versus returning staff) over time (three data collection points). In the Wilks' Lambda multivariate test, the between-subject variable "status" was significant, and the within-subjects variables "time" and the time-by-status interaction were also significant ($p<.001$). Given the overall significance, the four measures (importance to camp, importance to me, difficulty, and ability) were investigated with step-down univariate analysis. The results of the step-down analysis for difficulty and ability will be reviewed in this paper. Univariate tests for "difficulty" and "ability" showed significant differences ($p<.05$, $p<.001$ respectively) for the time-by-status interaction.

Difficulty

In terms of "difficulty," returning staff reported consistent perceptions, new staff reported increases at each of the three measurement points, and converged with returning staff after one-month-on-the-job (see Table 2). Investigation of the content-item means indicated significant differences in five of the 24 items: 1) "I know where all of the camp buildings are located and could find them again"; 2) "I know all the areas that could be dangerous for campers on the camp property"; 3) "I can re-direct a situation in a positive way when something is going wrong"; 4) "I know how to complete the day-to-day paperwork required for my job"; and 5) "I can help a camper overcome homesickness."

Investigation of the means (see Table 3) indicates that new staff reported an increase in perceptions of dangerous places in camp from the first to the last days of training, while returning staff reported a decrease. In dealing with homesick children, both new and returning staff re-

TABLE 2
Composite Variable "Difficulty"
Mean and Standard Error Time-by-status

Status	Time	M	SD
New	1	88.44	3.00
	2	93.16	3.94
	3	102.11	3.74
Returning	1	104.93	3.56
	2	105.23	4.69
	3	104.71	4.44

TABLE 3
Mean and Standard Deviations of Significant Individual Items: "Difficulty" Time-by-status

		Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
Item	Status	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Buildings	New	3.09	1.84	2.76	2.25	2.87	2.61
	Return	2.15	2.34	2.35	2.63	2.19	2.70
	Total	2.68	2.12	2.59	2.42	2.58	2.66
Danger	New	3.23	2.19	3.89	2.10	3.84	2.56
	Return	3.98	2.25	3.75	2.51	3.60	2.45
	Total	3.55	2.24	3.83	2.28	3.74	2.51
Redirect	New	4.66	2.55	4.51	2.41	8.02	1.55
	Return	5.35	2.11	5.23	2.36	8.09	1.12
	Total	4.96	2.39	4.82	2.41	8.05	1.38
Paperwork	New	2.69	1.88	3.10	2.03	3.58	2.18
	Return	3.47	2.04	3.91	1.90	3.72	2.30
	Total	3.02	1.98	3.45	2.01	3.64	2.23
Homesick	New	4.11	2.87	4.33	2.91	8.30	1.23
	Return	5.49	2.37	5.51	2.35	8.07	1.65
	Total	4.70	2.74	4.83	2.74	8.20	1.42

Note: See Table 1 for complete listing of the item wording.

TABLE 4
Composite Variable "Ability"
Mean and Standard Error Time-by-status

Status	Time	M	SD
New	1	105.71	3.57
	2	137.24	3.79
	3	169.63	2.51
Returning	1	165.08	4.25
	2	175.65	4.51
	3	175.47	2.99

TABLE 5
Mean and Standard Deviations of Significant Individual Items: Ability Time-by-status

		Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
Item	Status	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Buildings	New	5.23	2.98	7.23	2.32	8.14	1.58
	Return	8.23	1.44	8.49	1.35	8.40	1.65
	Total	6.52	2.86	7.77	2.06	8.26	1.61
Philosophy	New	5.40	2.52	6.77	2.14	7.77	1.57
	Return	7.37	1.88	7.74	1.76	8.19	1.17
	Total	6.24	2.47	7.18	2.04	7.95	1.42
Danger	New	4.66	2.55	4.51	2.41	8.02	1.55
	Return	5.35	2.11	5.23	2.36	8.09	1.12
	Total	4.96	2.39	4.82	2.41	8.05	1.38
Emergency	New	3.35	3.43	6.41	2.89	7.24	2.24
	Return	7.48	2.03	7.87	1.87	7.80	1.92
	Total	5.12	3.56	7.03	2.60	7.48	2.12
Improvise	New	4.70	3.15	5.84	3.02	6.89	1.95
	Return	6.92	1.66	7.12	1.85	7.22	1.40
	Total	5.65	2.83	6.39	2.65	7.03	1.74
Redirect	New	4.86	3.20	5.71	3.10	8.02	1.55
	Return	6.80	1.74	7.07	1.96	8.09	1.12
	Total	5.69	2.83	6.29	2.75	8.05	1.38
Help	New	6.04	2.92	6.70	2.72	7.23	1.80
	Return	6.97	1.99	7.19	2.05	6.91	2.24
	Total	6.44	2.60	6.91	2.46	7.09	2.00
Parent	New	4.10	3.75	5.53	3.34	7.14	1.76
	Return	7.05	1.49	7.46	1.44	6.98	2.15
	Total	5.36	3.33	6.35	2.85	7.08	1.93
Resolution	New	3.76	3.42	4.81	3.38	6.88	2.04
	Return	6.69	1.81	7.00	2.08	6.67	1.99
	Total	5.01	3.19	5.75	3.08	6.79	2.01
On-time	New	4.85	3.43	5.34	3.69	7.97	1.46
	Return	7.22	1.67	7.29	2.35	7.66	1.84
	Total	5.86	3.04	6.17	3.32	7.84	1.64
Break	New	3.53	3.45	4.86	3.62	6.89	1.70
	Return	6.65	1.98	6.77	2.11	7.12	1.61
	Total	4.86	3.29	5.67	3.20	6.98	1.66
Balance	New	4.47	3.31	5.02	3.51	7.03	1.88
	Return	6.93	1.71	7.25	1.70	7.34	1.30
	Total	5.52	3.00	5.98	3.08	7.16	1.66
Adapt	New	3.80	3.44	4.66	3.61	6.86	2.06
	Return	6.23	2.65	6.73	2.02	6.96	1.74
	Total	4.84	3.34	5.55	3.19	6.90	1.92
Attention	New	3.44	3.25	4.14	3.55	7.81	1.61
	Return	6.30	1.97	6.57	2.36	7.56	1.76
	Total	4.66	3.11	5.18	3.31	7.70	1.67

Teach	New	3.69	3.40	4.55	3.53	6.97	1.93
	Return	6.40	2.33	7.24	1.64	7.36	1.38
	Total	4.85	3.27	5.70	3.17	7.14	1.72
Correct	New	4.35	3.61	5.23	3.69	6.88	2.12
	Return	6.83	2.18	7.27	1.77	7.18	1.96
	Total	5.41	3.31	6.10	3.18	7.01	2.05
Paperwork	New	3.20	2.96	5.23	2.82	6.77	2.08
	Return	5.33	2.63	6.95	1.58	7.19	1.93
	Total	4.11	3.01	5.96	2.51	6.95	2.02
Policy	New	5.11	2.92	7.01	1.85	7.43	1.99
	Return	7.26	2.04	8.00	1.20	7.64	1.97
	Total	6.03	2.79	7.43	1.67	7.52	1.97
Chain	New	4.97	2.98	7.47	1.89	7.62	1.72
	Return	7.49	2.26	8.06	1.26	7.71	1.67
	Total	6.05	2.97	7.72	1.67	7.66	1.69
Job Details	New	5.13	2.56	6.78	2.41	7.47	1.73
	Return	6.49	2.70	7.58	1.41	7.84	1.42
	Total	5.71	2.70	7.12	2.07	7.63	1.61
Staff Behavior	New	5.76	3.31	7.35	2.58	7.81	2.18
	Return	7.95	1.80	8.17	1.85	8.24	1.48
	Total	6.70	2.96	7.70	2.33	8.00	1.92
Open-Ended	New	4.53	3.40	5.54	3.31	7.09	1.95
	Return	6.72	2.08	6.84	2.33	6.91	1.79
	Total	5.47	3.10	6.10	2.99	7.01	1.88
Limits	New	3.59	3.53	5.42	3.14	6.82	2.22
	Return	6.43	2.37	6.69	2.22	7.19	1.44
	Total	4.80	3.39	5.97	2.85	6.98	1.92
Homesick	New	3.49	3.48	4.86	3.60	8.30	1.23
	Return	6.44	2.17	6.73	2.22	8.07	1.65
	Total	4.75	3.32	5.66	3.22	8.20	1.42

Note: See Table 1 for complete listing of the item wording.

ported no change in perceptions of difficulty from first to last training days, but an increase was reported by one-month-on-the-job. New staff members rated knowing locations of buildings to be more difficult than returning staff, but even this was perceived as a low level of difficulty (3 on a 9-point scale). For redirecting, paperwork, and homesickness, new staff members reported higher difficulty scores. Returning staff member ability scores were higher than new staff members.

Ability

In terms of "ability," both new and returning staff reported an increase throughout the summer; returning staff started with a higher self-perception of ability than new staff at the beginning and end of training, but convergence occurred at one-month-on-the-job (see Table 4).The reports from new staff members revealed high standard deviations at the first two measurement points. Further investigation is warranted to explore that variability, and why it decreases by one-month-on-the-job. Investigation

of the content-item means (see Table 5) revealed significant differences on all of the 24 content items.

DISCUSSION

Three interesting areas of consideration are generated by the perception differences between new and returning staff members at the different points of time during their camp experience: (1) the relative lack of change in perception of difficulty by returning staff throughout the experience, (2) the growth in perceptions of ability by new staff members at each measurement point, and (3) the convergence of the two groups by the one-month-on-the-job measure in terms of both difficulty and ability. This study does not allow for causation between the timing of the change. It does, however, provide a platform for discussion and examination of possible explanations that could provide insight into the learning processes during the employment of a camp staff member.

Although differences existed between new and returning staff-member perceptions, the lack of change in perception of difficulty by returning staff throughout the experience is curious given that many of the skills and knowledge items are never fully mastered as either youth development leaders or as parents. The new staff-member perceptions of "difficulty" rose slightly, but not significantly from the first to last days of training, yet were still significantly lower than returning staff. This difference might mean that there was still not an understanding of how difficult the skills and knowledge would be to apply in the camp setting, despite possible prior experience working with children or preconceived ideas of what the job would entail. The exceptions to this trend were in the areas of dealing with homesickness and re-directing behavior. The "difficulty" rose dramatically, suggesting a realization that the more you know about those two skills, the more you realize the difficulty and complexity involved in addressing them.

The returning staff-member ratings of "ability" were higher than new staff-member reports and increased between the first and last days of training. This reported increase could be attributed to a combination of having a different set of peers to use as a reference set and confidence gained as a result of receiving additional training. New staff-member reports of "ability" rose more dramatically than the returning staff members. This change could indicate either an increased sense of confidence related to the ability to do the job or, alternatively, awareness that the camp administration wanted them to be competent at that point in time.

The convergence of the scores from returning and new staff by the one-month-on-the-job measure suggested a socialization process leading to a sense of community norms. This development of community is one of the goals of the formal camp orientation and is a stated purpose for many summer camps. The fact that the third measurement point for new staff members was consistent with the beginning point for the returning staff supported the carry-over of information from the previous season. This result suggested the need for further research to understand the socialization process and to explore the dynamic interplay between perceptions of the new staff and whether they felt constrained by the perceptions of the returning staff.

In terms of applications for staff training, two major points need to be considered: returning staff-member perceptions, and continuing education for both new and returning staff. This study provided a first step to understand returning staff members. For example, what can be done to build and strengthen the motivation so as to demonstrate growth as a returning staff member? Growth can be demonstrated in seeing the difficulty in a situation with complex layers or recognizing one's ability to handle the situation in different ways. Motivation may be strengthened by probing returning staff to share the complexities they observe, to encourage them to admit levels of difficulty, and be more open to educational opportunities to address these areas. This progression may lead to the possibility of returning staff being able to document growth in themselves. The notion of introducing concepts during the pre-camp orientation, and then going

into greater depth concerning these concepts once staff have had the opportunity to experience them, is supported by these data for both new and returning staff. The motivation literature (Vroom, 1964; Porter & Lawler, 1968) suggests an increased level of receptivity once the need or value is recognized internally rather than stressed externally.

Leading and training summer camp staff requires a delicate balance between building confidence and competence while intentionally building recognition of the complex and serious responsibility of the position. The process and individual content item information allowed for the exploration of training areas that camp directors can emphasize and build on during the season. It is heartening to see the apparent development of community and the perceptions of new staff members who learned so much during the season, yet disheartening to see the perceived stagnation of learning by returning staff. This exploratory study provides a baseline and process from which to build a framework for understanding and documenting the perceptions of staff members. This information can serve as a foundation to increase training effectiveness leading to greater effectiveness with participants.

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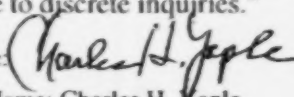
Signature:  Position: Executive Director

Printed Name: Charles H. Yaple Organization: Coalition for Education in the Outdoors

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